

Speaking up for Advocacy

Séamus Brennan launches new disability advocacy projects

Minister Séamus Brennan launched Comhairle's programme to support community and voluntary projects provide representative advocacy services for people with a disability on October 3rd. Over 50 people from all over Ireland attended the launch in the Davenport Hotel Dublin in October. The programme will enable 13 new projects to employ one or more advocates for two years to work with a range of people with disabilities.

"A proper, professional advocacy service is central to championing the rights of those with disabilities, particularly people who may feel at a disadvantage when claiming their entitlements", Minister Brennan said.

This initiative has been established in the context of the Disability Act 2005 and in preparation for the amendment of the Comhairle legislation that will introduce a Personal Advocacy Service for people with a disability. The Comhairle Advocacy Guidelines have been developed to assist these organisations.

Leonie Lunny, Chief Executive of Comhairle said: "Many people with disabilities are well equipped to make their own decisions. Given the requisite information and advice, some may be well placed to act as advocates themselves. However, some people with disabilities are at a disadvantage when claiming their entitlements or making important decisions. Advocacy can provide these more vulnerable people with the support necessary to make their own decisions and choices or deal with official processes".



Pictured at the launch of Comhairle Advocacy Programme and Guidelines were L-R: Regina Tinnelly, Monaghan Partnership, Mr Séamus Brennan, Minister for Social & Family Affairs, Leonie Lunny, Chief Executive, Comhairle and Malachy Marron, Monaghan Disability Network.

New Advocacy Executive joins Comhairle

Davin Roche, formerly Community Development Co-ordinator with Bray Partnership, has joined Comhairle as Advocacy Executive.



Advocacy on the net

Follow up advocacy on the net with these websites
<http://www.irishadvocacynetwork.com> Irish mental health peer advocacy network.
<http://www.actionforadvocacy.org.uk> Up to date news and articles of interest from the UK including online Planet Advocacy and a new draft code of practice
<http://www.asist.co.uk> Useful pages on policies and procedures, responding to common advocacy issues.

Projects receiving Advocacy funding from Comhairle - October 2005

Alzheimer Society of Ireland

The Alzheimer Society works on behalf of people with different types of dementia and their carers. The proposed project will provide independent support to people with Alzheimers and their carers at times of transition, safeguard the quality of care and protect older people who may be vulnerable to abuse. The service will initially be based in South Dublin and in Wexford.

Bray Partnership (& Bray Disability Cluster Group)

Bray Partnership is a local development company which seeks to progress social and economic activities and the Bray Disability Cluster group represents disabled people in the area. The project will seek to assist and represent young people with disabilities in transition from education, targeting those with complex needs. Outcomes should include increased choice and autonomy among clients.

Cheshire Community Services + Ballyfermot CIS

Cheshire Community Services (CCS) is part of the Cheshire Foundation, which serves people with significant physical disabilities. Its partner, Ballyfermot CIS already has the support of an Advocacy Resource officer. The project plans to provide representative advocacy to vulnerable people with disabilities through home visits where necessary. It will focus on quality of life and increased client autonomy.

Carlow Centre for Independent Living (+ CILs in SE Region)

Centres for Independent Living (CILs) exist to support individuals with disabilities in leading self-determined lives and participating in society. The proposed advocacy service will support clients to identify needs and make choices, with the advocate undertaking information, negotiation and representation work where necessary.

Multiple Sclerosis Society of Ireland (MS) North East Regional Team (Monaghan)

The MS Society of Ireland offers support, advice and in some cases, direct assistance to people with MS. The proposed project will provide an independent and flexible advocacy service to vulnerable clients, including those living in rural communities, those in inappropriate residential settings, young single mothers and clients with mental health difficulties.

Namhi + (Moore Abbey & St. Joseph's Intellectual Disability Services, Portrane)

Namhi is a national voluntary organisation for service providers and parents, which promotes the rights of people with intellectual disabilities. It aims to work with vulnerable people in its two partner organisations to provide an independent advocacy service to people in long term residential services where many vulnerable clients currently live.

National Representative Council (NRC) & (National Learning Network (NLN))

The National Representative Council provides an advocacy forum for people using NLN services in over 50 centres around Ireland – NLN is the training, education and employment access division of the Rehab group. The project aims to provide trained advocates to liaise with NLN self-advocacy groups and represent service-users in the area of complaints, access to entitlements or services and conflict resolution.

Roscommon County CIS + partners, (8 local disability groups)

Citizens Information Service (Roscommon) provides a variety of services to a range of client groups including outreach and liaises with other community and voluntary groups in the county. The project proposes a one-to-one advocacy service which will strongly emphasise equality, inclusiveness and the development of self-advocacy skills.

Sligo Interagency Disability Group + partners (HSE- NW Learning Disability Service & other Sligo disability groups)

The Sligo Interagency Disability Group is a partnership between a number of disability service providers in Sligo. It came together to pool experiences and empower people with learning disability. The project targets four groups: individuals moving to independent living settings, individuals without a service; those completing education or training and members of self advocacy committees. The advocate will offer a variety of support and representation.

S.T.E.E.R. Ireland

STEER is a community-based mental health service user initiative formed on a partnership between service-users and carers/family members. It is a cross border agency, involved in a number of projects with the HSE North West. The advocacy project is aimed at the "revolving door" group of mental health service users – those who have been in and out of psychiatric units and are now living in supported accommodation. It will provide general welfare advocacy services and assistance with independent living.

County Monaghan Partnership + Co. Monaghan Disability Network

Co. Monaghan Partnership is involved with those experiencing social exclusion particularly in employment. Co. Monaghan Disability Network represents ninety disability groups. The project proposes to target people with disabilities with the most urgent needs in order to ease access to services and prevent people moving into residential care.

People with Disabilities Ireland Westmeath Network (& HSE Midland area and Parents & Friends)

PwDI is a national representative organisation of people with disabilities, funded by Government. The project which is run with the HSE aims to provide a representative advocacy service for adults with intellectual disabilities who are moving from two large residential centres.

Schizophrenia Ireland (SI) + partner Irish Advocacy Network (IAN)

SI provides a range of information support and professional services for people with serious mental health difficulties and their families and carers in seven locations around the country. IAN supports mental health survivors in speaking up for themselves and taking control of their own lives. The project aims to set up a professional advocacy service in the community aimed particularly at those leaving mental health hospitals.

Finglas Advocacy Training Programme

Age Action North Dublin in cooperation with the Finglas Cabra Partnership and various other local agencies have just completed the first pilot advocacy training programme for volunteers in the Finglas area. The aim of this pilot project is to work towards giving all older people in Finglas a voice through advocacy.

The training was made up of eight different modules and presentations were delivered by a variety of organisations including the HSE Northern Area, Age Action Ireland, Dublin City Council, Citizen's Information Centre, Age and Opportunity, local councillors and the Office of the Ombudsman. Some of the topics covered included the importance of advocacy for older people, accessing community services for older people, elder abuse in

the community, the importance of maintaining a fit and healthy lifestyle in later years and how to process a complaint on someone's behalf in a positive manner.

Many of the participants were older people themselves with an interest in advocating for other older people. The overall feedback from the participants about the training has been very positive. Some of the participants felt the training had "Far exceeded expectations" and had served to "Make me aware of lots of issues". The next priority for this project will be to promote the service in the area and give the volunteers ongoing support and supervision to serve as advocates for older people.

Further Information can be had from Avril Dooley
Age Action North Dublin - Tel (01) 475 6989
E-mail: aand@ageaction.ie

Comhairle is the national agency responsible for supporting the provision of information, advice and advocacy to the public on the broad range of social and civil services. Comhairle provides the Oasis website and is the support agency for the network of Citizens Information Centres and Citizens Information Phone Service. Comhairle also supports the development of advocacy services for individuals, particularly those with a disability.

COMHAIRLE HEAD OFFICE

7th Floor
Hume House
Ballsbridge
Dublin 4

t +353 1 605 9000
f +353 1 605 9099
e info@comhairle.ie
w www.comhairle.ie

Comhairle Advocacy Guidelines



The Comhairle Advocacy Guidelines aim to provide parameters to the community and voluntary sector in setting up and

running quality advocacy services. As these services are still exploratory the Guidelines will be reviewed regularly in light of experience on the ground. The document contains an Introduction, Definitions and Principles of Advocacy, details on Planning and Developing an Advocacy Service and desired Competencies for Advocates.

Principles for Advocates

- **Empowerment of the person with a disability wherever possible**

- **Respect for the person and his/her wishes**
- **Acting in the person's best interests**
- **Acting independently**
- **Maintaining confidentiality**
- **Acting with diligence and competence.**

Organisations should have a clear purpose and target group, manage potential conflicts of interest, provide training, support and supervision to advocates, opt for mediated solutions where possible and follow best practice on governance and accountability.

The qualities needed by the ideal advocate include: communication skills, sound judgement, interpersonal skills, analytical thinking, knowledge of disability services and issues.

The planning section deals with scope and quality of service-consultation and prioritisation issues, case management & complaints procedures. The report also emphasises the need for good feedback and for services to be evaluated as they develop.

More Advocacy Resource Officers in Dublin and Tipperary-Limerick

Comhairle has tendered among Citizen Information Services (CIS) for the employment of two further Advocacy Resource Officers (AROs) who will support advocacy work across a partnership of 2-3 CIS. Tenders closed on Sept 30th and several excellent proposals were received. The successful projects are:

- Co Tipperary CIS and Limerick CIS • City Centre (Dublin) CIS, Crumlin CIS and Dublin 8 and Bluebell CIS

The new AROs should be in place early in 2006.

Self Advocates Again

NAMHI held a very successful conference for self-advocates in the Radisson Hotel in Athlone on 6th September. Particularly interesting were a series of videos about the ordinary lives of people with learning disabilities. NAMHI also launched their *My Voice, My Choice Information Pack* which covers Advocacy, Money, Bullying, Rights and of course Self Advocacy in a simple and attractive format. *More information in our next issue!*



Delegates from St Michael's House with Liza Kelly NAMHI at the NAMHI self advocates conference in Athlone.

Centres for Independent Living planning for change

A new National Advisory Group (NAG) for the Centres for Independent Living was set up on 12th October. It aims to promote the idea of independent living and work for change in policies and actions – a form of practical advocacy. Helen Lahert represents Comhairle on the NAG.